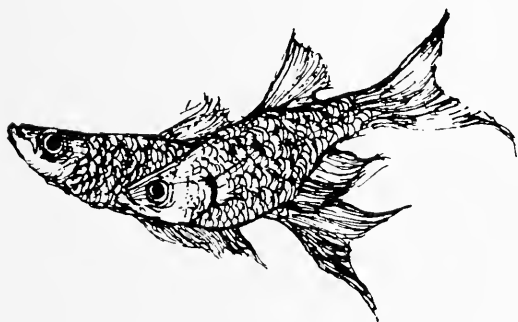


Poetry



QUAD

Spring 1975



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Sue Carol Smith

STATE HOSPITAL

An avenue of grey beard magnolia trees
Marks a stately path among the chalk white
Mansions bordered by lawns of tender green
Tended by khaki colored old men. Despite
The discreet sign on the iron barred gate
It hardly seems fitting that madness should hide
Behind the doors of former gentility, or rate
The calm serenity of houses once the pride
If the river rich. Yet silent halls
Echo with the footsteps of nurses, ghost clad,
Flitting through the chambers of madness to calls
Of the blackest terror. And midnight mad
Old women rock the hours by endlessly
Upon the verandas of sanity
stately.

HOMECOMING

All gone, the foot dangling days
When the blackberry children lay
On the shaved green and spun
Cotton castles for the unclocked summer.

All lost, the never coming wait
When the father hour was late
And waiting for the firefly time
Before the screen door night.

All still, the evenings phoenix truck
Rising from the powder road's dust
And hiding beyond the house's spying
While the sun sank slowly dying.

Sue Carol Smith

CROW ON SNOW

Incongruous bird,
A blemish upon the cheek
Of earth's powdered face.

COLLEGE OF CARDINALS

A gathered congregation in downy painted red
They gather here each morning.
Each prelate wears a pointed hood upon his head
And a mask as black as mourning.

In swooping descent they convene and without a word of warning
They session upon the ground.
A feathered nun attends each one, a harbinger of burning
Inhabits her nesting brown.

Lightly dancing across the straw in ritual of dawn
They fling the dawn a greeting;
Then lifting their sleeves of scarlet to designate the crown
They select a prince for the meeting.

From his throne behind the clouds the sun is peeping
Upon his flock of red.
He adjourns the day with the blessing of night, lightly speeding
The college of cardinals to bed.

MIDEASTERN THOUGHTS

I've never been closer to Egypt or its Arab family
Than the Georgia coast
Never even seen a camel
Can't think of any Moslems I know
A desert climate doesn't really excite me
I've gotten so used to shade trees
Drinking water when I please
Living in luxury and ease
Death has the look of gas stations all boarded up
Of empty smokestacks and stomachs over no supper
It sounds with the roar of silent cars
And idle barges.
Mushrooms spring
From scorching sand in nightmare dreams.

SAVIOUR

When wings
Of reason tire
And start an earthbound fall
Winds of will blowing hard let it
Soar on.

John Emfinger

I
small rivulets of blood
pale pink, watery
dried on the window pane
splattered from a small body
hurling, crashing into the
formless icily clear barrier
shiny, impenetrable as steel
a fist hammering against the
unopened door, knuckles bloody
feathers ruffled, torn shrieking,
cawing, madly careening
towards the window, again and again.

small bones breaking, still he flies
desperate headlong collisions
for hours, for days he persists

"I wish he'd go away. There's nothing
here for him, and he's upsetting
the children."

chilled, I keep my vigil over
this ballet of agonized repetition.
until finally one morning he is gone.

mother cleans the window.

II
I have become that small winged body..
you watch me, puzzled, uneasy
finding my agony distasteful
you close your blinds, your curtains,
slip the last brick of your still-wet cement
wall into place. now protected and unmoved
you keep a strange and watchful silence.

III
six months ago you left that room
I seldom soar past treetops now
but flutter instead at windows
looking for you to return to that
room, where your ghost still lingers,
scowling at your blood-stained windows.

Sharon Isay

I wait for you to come back and clean them.

THE GAMBLER

the trapeze man stands poised, like a clap of thunder
the cymbals crash, and he soars though the air lightly
Oooooooh! the audiences crane their necks in wonder
at this dare-devil, laughing in death's face nightly.

he is a reckless demon, courting death with each leap
swinging in this great chasm of eternity for fame
on silver bars and other men's hands, he keeps
watch for his demons, paying a price for acclaim.

Sharon Isay

anonymous

"E"

ThErE is an Enormous girl
(in my EnvironmEntal ProblEmS class)
that rEminds mE of a hugE old orangutan
thE nEw york city bronx zoo
usEd to havE
whEn i was littlE;
my childish fascination couldn't
comprEhEnd
that Enormous thing with no light in its EyEs.
and thE mEmory of those hot july saturdayS
in nEw york and thE hot concrEtE railing
and that squint-EyEd thing
comEs to mE in full in class just now,
its Enormous dErriErE and motionlEss framE
and dull EyEs-

thErE is an Enormous girl
in my EnvironmEntal problEmS class.

Barry Seymore

FOR BODHISHIVA

Bodhishiva,
 bodhishiva
woman on the knee
under roof of forest
in the paid for Ford
on the grain of thin wall stench
how the cement tongue of leisure
longs to learn the words,
in a brass mouth
 those dreamy apple sky words
 those candlelight mon amour words
 hayloft whore jenny by the fireside words
 those heaving breast beneath the arched
 velvet those harlot starlet Scarlet
 words whispered wet ear words
 those lover's else in a mirror winked
 eye to eye-

 Bodhishiva,
 Bodhishiva
Teach my metal tongue in the midnight bells
to toll
 those Words!

like a silver eye
of fish
flat on the waters surface
this sky bowl

your molluscan midnight
grease and your hand
slime and the sick feel
of the water

it stinks,
the river
trudging past like an old man
drunk in the morning
throwing up for breakfast
the old cars
the brave machines
my grandmother's fantasy
your crotchpiece
and the steel cods of amerika
held tight there
in musky glandular oil.
the organ as an organism
the metal cold,
real as life
the sky blinks

Barry Seymore

CHRYSTALINE

Chrystaline,
unfolding wings be-
fore skin
tonite where the light
might transport me
under the edge of the sill
thine will
be done,

Chrystaline,
behind the azure sheen
of sky my
masking Peregrene
tears at skin
the oils of sin
fill his beak
the plummet and steep squals
vortexed behind us,
drowning, unsexed Hori
Zens

obscure distance
at the lens,
your lush song
on a mutilated ear
here bor real forests
and wands of evergreen snow
night snow night snow night night
snow-that
night netted like caterpillars
high in the Franciscans

my love, translated
scream, my my my my,
Chrystaline,

GOING AROUND WITH A CRANIAL CANNON

Amen.

Steve Bostic

The creatures here below please stand
to praise him from whom all blessings flow
and catch one last departing glimpse
of their tithe and tax deduction.

The choir and organist/church host
above in the loft (of course)
can (and do) modulate up a heavenly half-step
on every verse
of every
glorious
hymn.

They all feast upon the priest's enunciation
and the father of the hour feeds his flock.

(Somewhere I hear a dying and rising
lord start singing the blues)

Segments of scripture shoot through my skull
—great-grand dad's iniquitous; Jehovah's jealous—
and the whole leeching affair makes me want to void where its prohibited.

I say
Let them prey
upon the faithful, who, overly fed
exhibit concern for departed dead
and seek to secure a position sure
upon some heavenly tablet pure.

I am willing to let them be damned for the glory of God.

(Dying and rising lord song, enter
second voice.)

Oh Lord have mercy on all of us
and, as is your common practice,
send your rain on me
(thus also on the bishops)

Now I'm spooked by a sacred specter
and I can't seem to find my tongue
for I've numbered the children of Israel
while the stones become Abraham's sons

But somewhere I hear a third voice name you
Our Father.

WHY FLOWERS AREN'T FOR VIRGINS

Of all Nature's naivety,
Your flowers would seem the apogee.
It's all dissimulation, though;
Albeit they seem as pure as snow,
The innocence is all a fraud
And every flower's born a bawd.

When twined in some sweet maiden's hair,
By contrast, what they publish there!--
For every petalous array
Is an alluring negligee:
Yea, even Clover's shy attire
Can wake a drowsing bumble's fire
To bring the golden dust to parts
Where floral copulation starts.

Then weave a daisy wreath, my dear,
And tuck a rose behind your ear,
Nor weep that summer's nearly sped.
No flower keeps her maidenhead!
Before your cheek has lost its bloom
'Twill be your lot to know a groom.

Ann Pitts

Theo Baylis

THE ASYLUM AT SAINT-REMY IN MARCH

The cries of jays outside my window
 irritate me considerably, as if to warn.
I notice the coils of fat encircling my finger bones,
 that seem so manniken-like, so not-me.
The many red ocher hairs springing from my arm
 glow in the sunshine's hot bath, as they
 stay and catch these lines of gold.
The mourning dove's weeping intensifies the
 black twisted branches and cowardly leaves
 of spring, the dead and drooping strange
 spider shapes of green testing the cool air.
The black designs of the trees behind these
 peeling-green barred window panes seem
 intense and bewildered, and the far tormented
 black cypresses spiral and spurt from the earth.
Everything so flat and yet in two dimensions
 excitedly overwrought--
And my black rung chair by the window has
 been taken again.

Carl Johnson

DEATH WISH

If age fosters wisdom
Early death is more sane.
For the older are wiser
But the dead in less pain.

Yet if wisdom tracks truth
And truth is finality,
The end wise men seek
Must then be senility.

GRAVE NOTE

The spirit makes the softest sound
On leaving the corpse for God's throne;
Only one tune compares underground:
That of flesh dissolving from bone.

REALITY IN OPPOSITION

Without some small works, could others be great?
Could the sun bring man hope before the cold rain?
Is love not defined as the absence of hate?
Without some small works, could others be great?
Reunion is a miracle only after long wait.
If there's no God, then there's nothing profane.
Without some small works, could others be great?
Could the sun bring man hope before the cold rain?

LOVE'S HOME

Man in love inhabits
The world of a tropical plain;
Filled with much good sunshine,
But curse by such volume of rain!

THE DREAM OF BRIAR ROSE

The girl peach-blooming, a dancer
In the eye-blue sky of Easter; pear and apple blossoms
Quickened in her skin, and her laughter
Spun delicate green lace on flexing twigs.

The boy robed in the shimmering light of a summer morning,
With hair a vegetable gold, a morning
Flowing toward a summer noon of thunder,
A sun blotted in his cloud-gray eyes.

The man with chestnut eyes, and time-gleaned brow
Bursting with ripe sweat as his stick-dry fingers
Made some fecund lovely thing, while he was whistling
A thousand red-winged blackbirds.

And I slept past three seasons, and awoke
Into a winter without thaw, where icicles
Splinter on the broken thorns, and a cankered sun
Withers in the everlasting night.

Mary Kay Temple

**VARIATION II:
FOR THE WINTER IS PAST**

The fields lie fallow,
 awaiting the anxious seeds and the new cycle.
The long incisions in the dark earth the plowman
 has made curve by in stillness.
The starling search the barren fields,
 rising empty in ashen clouds for other clouds.

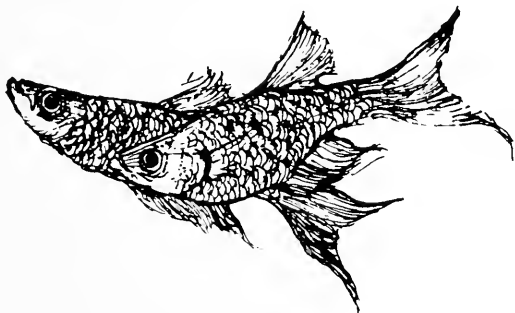
Dull brown the colour of these fields,
 here and there yet too eager green
 lies folded over with the night's touch.
The hogs sleep late in the dark woods
 through this frosted morning,
 hot tubs of flesh against the cold.
The ice on the pond yields to the sun,
 its frogs and whiskered cats with
 slowed blood asleep at the pond's bottom.

Soon the fecund earth with pride will swell.
 and flower and seed to their own end hasten.
The wild apple among the trees of the wood will flower,
 and the timid green then appear.
For the winter is past,
 and spring is come to dance her due.

Bill Meredith



Short Stories



QUAD
Spring 1975



THE QUESTION

I was ten in the summer of 1933. The new President told us that we were in a depression but that didn't mean a thing to me. What did mean something was the weather. Alabama in 1933 was hot and dry. By August there wasn't a green cotton field anywhere around Pine Bluff and the farmers sat in the shade of the awning of Al Jinnings' store in dirty overalls and grease-stained hats, spitting Red Man tobacco, and turning medium sticks of wood into thin pig-tailed ribbons. The farmers weren't the only ones who suffered. My friends and I nearly burned up that August because Bell's Creek was dry and that meant that there wasn't any swimming or fishing. Without the creek the chance of an exciting summer was impossible, or at least it seemed that way until the Leadbedders came to Pine Bluff.

I didn't see them when they first drove out of the dust and into town to ask the way to the Stamper farm, but in a small town you don't always have to be in the right place at the right time to know that something has happened. There are no secrets in a town as small as Pine Bluff.

"There's some new people in town. They come in yesterday." Daddy looked up from his stained supper plate.

Momma sat back a moment letting the words sink in. "Who are they?"

"Don't know." The heat of the kitchen seemed to absorb the words. "They---he come into the store and asked if they was a place around here that was open."

"You tell'm about the Stamper's farm?" Momma's voice sounded tired and then.

"Yhea, I told him the Stamper place was up for the taxes."

Daddy pushed his plate forward across the red and white checked table cloth and leaned back in his chair. "I guess they went out there, but God knows where they will get the money for the taxes."

"How many of them were there." Momma was reaching for the stained plates.

"Three---the man, a boy and a girl."

"May I be excused?" I always tried to make my voice sound as deep as Daddy's when I was around him.

"Yes, but don't you run off" Momma had the say as to when a man could leave her table.

I ran from the heat of the kitchen into the coolness that is the hour of half-light in a Southern summer evening thinking of the new people. New people in Pine Bluff were a curiosity. Especially when they came into town looking for a farm in August. Most farmers would have moved in January or February after the cotton had been picked, but never in August. If he was looking for work as a picker this was the wrong year because there wasn't going to be any cotton to be picked. Looks like he would have known that by just looking around him.

It never occurred to me that the old man might not want work, but then I didn't understand that there are other ways of making a living than following a mule down a row or using a hoe to execute

weeds. It may not have come to me too quickly but the rest of the town seemed to catch on real quick. Of course it wasn't too hard to guess because the only time you saw Leadbedder was when he came to Al Jinnings' store to buy food. In fact it was in Jinnings' store that I first saw the man we had spent the summer talking about.

The fall after they came I had secured the job of Al Jinnings assistant which meant that I had to get up early to set a fire in the cast iron stove at the store before I went to school and then return after school to sweep out the mud the farmers had tracked in that day. I did an awful lot of work for the fifty cents a week Mr. Jinnings paid me.

I had been following this routine for about two months when I met Leadbedder. A cold January rain had been falling all day, and although it was only four in the afternoon the sky looked like it was night. Mr. Jinnings had the lights on in the store, and the stove was glowing sun red. Funny thing about those stoves they look so warm but you get five or ten feet away from them and you are cold. In the back of the store you wouldn't have known there was a stove in the building. The Wolverine Shoes stayed in boxes in this part of the building and Mr. Jinnings had me at work sorting the boxes by size. The work wasn't hard but the lack of heat soon had me frozen to the bone. The last box in place, I made ready to rush to the warmth of the stove.

"Mr. Jinnings, Mr. Jinn---" I was running back from the shelf where the shoes stayed, around the nail bins which divided the front part of the store from the back, and right into him. I hit him square in the chest with all my force, but he didn't move. I know I pulled away just as soon as I hit him, but that moment lasted forever. The wetness of his coat covered my cheek with an ooze that burned and froze at the same time. I fell back from him only to have my eyes meet a face covered with thick black hair from which little pieces of ice dangled, and finally, eyes that burned with fire.

"Boy." That was all he said to me, but that was enough to make something in my heart flutter when ever I saw him.

II

The summer of 1938 brought something new into my life, girls. Me and a couple of friends were learning the pleasures of "tom catting" with the young ladies of Pine Bluff. It was a time of more talk than action. It seems that there weren't many young ladies in Pine Bluff that were willing to share our company, but then there weren't many girls in Pine Bluff. The best we could hope for was a trip to the woods during a church social. The only possible hope for any "pitching and wooing" was Elen Smith. About her and the others that were a little free we only knew what we had heard, but that was enough at that age.

Old man Leadbedder was making whiskey for the county now and every-so-often me and a friend would sneak out to their place to watch the comings and goings on Saturday night. Cars would churn up a trail of dust coming through town, make the turn to Leadbedder's and pull up at the house. Someone would get out, go in, and come back a few minutes later with a jug or two. Most of the cars were old field-cars, but every-so-often a new shiny car would pull up; they always had people from Southport in them.

Rose Anne's brother had run away the spring after they showed up, so she and the old man were living there alone. I had seen her in town a few times, walking up the street with her finger in her mouth looking in the windows of the stores. Once Tommy Smith saw her walking along the street holding something in her arms.

"What you got there?"

"I ain't got nothing." Her eyes were empty.

"Sure you do. There in your arms. What do you have?"

"It ain't nothing."

"It's got'a be something."

"No it don't---it don't got to be nothing."

"Let me see---OK."

"No you can't---it's a puppy, but you can't see him."

"I like dogs. Let me see."

"No---no you can't."

"I'll give you a piece of candy if you let me see him." Tommy started to fumble in the back pocket of his faded jeans.

"Let me see the candy. You ain't got no candy."

Tommy found a piece of hard scotch candy and held it before her eyes in the open palm of his hand. Rose Anne stared at it blankly for a moment, and then, with a sudden burst of energy, she snatched the cellophane encased sweet from his hand. The object she had held fell with a lifeless thud to the ground. It had once been a puppy.

III

After Pearl Harbor I went to war and old man Leadbedder went to jail. His whiskey business had done real good for several years, until they found Billy Murphy dead in a ditch one Sunday morning with a half empty jug of Leadbedder's whiskey beside him. The next day the sheriff drove up from Southport and got Leadbedder. His trial didn't last long; it isn't hard to find a man guilty of something the whole county knows he did. They gave him a five year sentence and sent him to Montgomery.

I made it through the war in one piece. After it was over the GI Bill that Senator Sparkman sent to Congress put me through college and then law school. When I finished, there just wasn't any reason to go back to Pine Bluff so I started with Smith Larson in Southport.

IV

I had been with the firm for eight years of land disputes, estate settlements, and car accidents when the murder happened. It was the ninth of August, 1959. I remember that day because Sally Graham burst into the office with much more than her usual secretarial zeal.

"Guess what?" Sally dropped into the depth of the barrel backed wooden chair by my desk.

"What?"

"They found two men on the new interstate highway." She paused. "They were dead."

For some reason the information didn't hit me, and I let it show. My lack of interest didn't stifle Sally's enthusiasm.

"They weren't just dead, they were all cut up."

"Car wreck?" I spoke out of a feeling of duty.

"No, no, they were cut up. You know---an arm here, a leg there. They haven't found all the pieces yet. In fact they haven't found either head. The police have been looking since last night."

I let the conversation die, but its death was short lived. A summons from the Smith half of the partnership greeted me when I came to work two days later.

"Come in and sit down." He hadn't glanced up from the papers he held. "Something has happened and I want to talk to you about it." Smith dropped the papers and creaked back in his chair.

"That murder, they picked up someone, and the D.A. has asked us to defend her."

I hollowly echoed the word "her."

"Yhea, someone named Rose Anne Leadbedder. You know her, she's from Pine Bluff?"

Did I know her? No, not really, but then you never know anyone. "Yhea, I remember her. She grew up there about the same time I did."

"They're holding her down at the jail. The Sheriff picked her up at her old man's house." He stopped cold for a moment as he always did when he wished to make a point strongly. "They found the axe in the trunk of her old man's car."

"Was it the same one the killer used?"

"It had blood on it and there was blood all over the trunk of the car and everybody knows the old man can't drive." Mr. Smith was looking at the ceiling. "I want you to go down to the jail and talk with her. See if you can get her to make a plea."

"I don't want the case."

"I'm not asking you to take it."

That was the end of the conversation. I walked down to the red brick courthouse, across the oiled wooden floors, and through the double glass doors with SHERIFF stenciled on them. The deputy at the desk looked up as I came in.

"Well, they said you'd be coming to see her." His parted lips showed tobacco brown teeth. "You want to go'n up?"

"No, not this minute." I stopped. "What did you boys find out about the men?"

"They was two of them." The deputy seemed pleased with his answer.

"I knew that, but who were they?"

"Well, the best we can figure---." He paused a moment. "Without no heads to look at, one of them was named John Bell and th'other was Bob Cummings. The nigger that helped 'm with they logging called the Sheriff a couple days after word got out that we'd found the bodies, and said 'he just knowd them wuz dead.' He seemed to enjoy his affected accent.

"So what happened then?" I felt a bead of sweat crawl down the narrow part of my back.

"We done some checking around after talk'n to the nigger, but it didn't come to much. Somebody said they seen them two at Al Jinnings' store; so we drove down there to talk to the old man. Hell, that son-of-a-bitch is nearly dead. Can't hardly walk; deaf as a log. He hadn't seen nothing, but one of the boys out front said he saw them two a josling around with Leadbedder's girl down the street. Someone said they seen them leave in a car."

"I'll need those names."

"There in the official report." The Deputy seemed to get a pleasure out of the words "official report."

"Where did you find the girl?" I was hoping that he would hurry up because the August heat was beginning to sink into my skin.

"We drove out to Leadbedder's place and the old man was sitting on the porch rocking real slow. The Sheriff walked up to the bottom step and said 'hey, old man---I'm talking to you. Now, you listen to me. Wher's your daughter?' The Sheriff said it just like that; kind of low with a growl."

I would have been happy if he had just told me where they picked her up and left the details out. "Well."

"The Sheriff asked him one more time about where the girl was and he stopped rocking, looked the sheriff in the eye, and said 'inside.' That was all he said. Now I've seen men---."

I cut him off. "Was she inside?"

"Yhea, she was sittin' on the floor."

"Just sitting?"

"Yhea, just sitting there kind of rocking back and forth an' mumbling." A funny sort of smile flashed over his face. "Sitting there in a bloody dress."

I didn't go see Rose Anne that day. Some how I just couldn't. In fact I waited for as long as I could because I didn't want to see her or to be a part of her case. Two days past; I couldn't put it off any longer.

The sheriff had her in a conference room by the time I got to the courthouse. She was slumped in a chair with the same grace as a sack of potatoes. The pink flowered yellow dress seemed glued to the bulges and valleys that made her form. On top of this mound of glut sat a puffy lump with curly dark greasy hair and two eyes sunk deeply into the surrounding flesh. I felt my stomach turn.

"Morning," I said. She sat unmoving, staring into nothing as if she were watching some action that only she could see. "My name is---."

Someone unseen signaled and she spoke. "Do you think it'll rain?" She hadn't moved her eyes but her mouth had moved almost as if it was independent of the rest of the body.

"Do I what?"

"Daddy says peoples from Southport ain't no good, but I like the men from here. One time Jonny-Paul taked me to the fair. That's nice when peoples takes you some place."

"Miss Leadbedder, I'm Jason Masters---."

"I don't know nobody named Massers."

"No, no you don't understand---I'm here to help you. To talk about what you did last Friday night."

"Daddy ain't right. Peoples in Southport good as any in Pine Bluff. Daddy just thinks he's real smart cause he makes you do what he wants. He ain't smart, he ain't."

She started to rock her head to the right and left like a slow pendulum. She stopped when spoke again.

"Miss Leadbedder." It occurred to me she might never have been called this before. "Rose Anne, we're gonna have to talk about last Friday."

"I don't got to do nothin---but sometimes what Daddy says. I don't got to do nothin."

"We must talk about last Friday."

"No, I don't want to."

"Damn it Rose Anne they saying you murdered them two boys and you wont talk to me. How in the hell am I gon'a help you."

"Don't you cuss around me. Daddy don't 'llow no man to cuss around me."

"Did you know John Bell or Bob Cummings? Tell me the truth because you know your Daddy wouldn't want you to tell a story." I said the word "Daddy" so that it sounded dirty.

"I might of knowd them."

"Did you see them last Friday?" I was beginning to feel a sense of hate that was directed toward the sick thing that sat in front of me staring into the empty air. She had done it and I had to get her to tell me about it.

"I don't want to talk no more."

"Bob Cummings, Rose Anne, he's dead. Cut up in little pieces like a hog and they're saying you did it."

"Bob was a nice boy and so was John. Except Bob never talked much."

"You saw them Friday, didn't you. Didn't you!"

"They were good boy's, but they shouldn't a done them things."

"What things?"

"Bad things with me---I don't like doing them bad things cause Daddy--cause I don't like doing them." Her voice was growing louder. "No body can make me. No body can make me do them things for anybody." She started to pound her fist on the arms on the chair.

"Rose Anne." She stopped pounding her fist. "Rose Anne, did you kill John and Bob because they tried those things."

"I didn't want them to get hurt but they tried them things. I didn't want them to get hurt." She was quiet again, content to stare into the depths of the air.

I left her slumped in the chair.

The next day I got her to X a plea of guilty and the whole thing was over in a week. The judge sent her to the Julia Tutwiler Institute for Women in Montgomery and the big murder case was closed.

V

We all felt good about it. People could walk the roads again, and our children were safe from Rose Anne. Everyone felt solidly secure, but there are times when even the most solid of substances crumble into dust. That's what happened to our security.

Late last year the old man died in the County Hospital. Before he died he made and signed a statement that he had killed the two men. He proved his statement by telling the sheriff where he could find the heads that hadn't been recovered. It didn't take much digging to find that the old man had been telling the truth; there were two skulls under the edge of the porch at Leadbedder's house.

I guess it was out of a sense of duty, and maybe a feeling that I could have been wrong that I asked to meet sheriff Bates in Southport to drive the last few miles with Rose Anne. Bates quickly agreed because he didn't really like the idea of having that "butcher" in the car with him. The sheriff had said that they would be in town by five, but the clock in the courthouse had struck the half-hour past six before the blue patrol car pulled up.

Rose Anne hadn't changed. She still looked like a child that had grown old without losing the fluffy features of a baby. Funny thing, the sight of her didn't effect me as it once had. Sitting there looking at that mass of fat I felt sorry I had been in such a hurry. She couldn't have killed those two men.

The ride didn't take long, and soon we were heading out of Pine Bluff to the dirt road that led to Leadbedder's farm. She hadn't said a word and I guess she probably hadn't said anything all day.

"Rose Anne." The sheriff's voice was low. "Rose Anne, we're here. You're home." The sheriff got out and opened the rear door of the car. Rose Anne slowly lumbered out of the car, up the steps and disappeared into the darkness behind the front door of the house.

"Damn sure glad that's over. I'll put her bags on the porch and we'll leave." I watched him take a cardboard case with a string tied around its waist from the trunk of the car and place it on the front porch. "The ride from Montgomery was like riding with a corpse. She didn't say a word."

"I don't think she talks much."

"Hell, far as I know, she can't speak a word."

We were back in Pine Bluff by this time.

"I'm gonna stop here and get some cigarettes. You want anything?"

"No, I'll wait here for you." I didn't feel like leaving the car. The sheriff returned in a few minutes.

"Damn, damn." He repeated the word a second time. "You see this box?"

"Yhea, I see it. So?"

"Well it's hers. I guess we better take it on back out there now. I don't know when I will be back over this way again." We started back down the road to the Leadbedder's farm.

Dusk was settling on the landscape now, making the pine woods on either side of the road look like caverns of darkness. The sheriff cut the lights of the car on although they did little good because there was too much light for them to work and too little not to use them.

"Maybe this will be the last time I have to come down this road today." Bates turned the car into the dirt road and we drove to the house, stopping in a cloud of road-dust.

"I'll take care of it." I don't know why I said that but I felt I had to.

I got the box from the back of the car and started toward the house. Something stopped me. It was a voice, a child's voice.

"They were good boys."

The voice was almost a mumble, soft, warm, and strangely sad. I looked to the right and there in the dusty half-light sat Rose Anne digging with an axe blade in the dirt below the porch, the dirt where they had found the heads.

William Parker

OF THE GOLDEN EYES

This is the story of a boy, my brother Pol. It is also a story of my clansmen, the Euweepee race, the Dark People of the Golden Eyes. To a stranger, our homeland would have appeared brown. From the last green mountain, our mountains, with jagged peaks piercing the sky, looked brown. The valleys were only sandboxes settled with dirt. Even the scraggly trees dotting the lower slopes were brown. But the brown itself was of various shades. The lower slopes were composed of a rich walnut grain, the peaks of a smudged dark chocolate.

There, with Maman and the baby Chinca, we lived in a matchbox shack of splintered wood, almost worn ivory like the soft skin of a faded leather sandal. Inside, Maman had laid sweet smelling hay on the dirt floor, and together we had woven the reed pallets we slept upon. Chinca's worn cradle and a low unfinished table were our only other pieces of furniture.

But it was home. A fire usually burned in our corner fireplace, and my charcoal sketchings of the family hung on the wall. There at the table, I would paint blown eggs for Maman to sell to the frivolous Green Mountain People. Pol worked in the topaz mines. And so we lived, barely sometimes, like all our people, but we lived.

At the time I speak of, Pol was eighteen, a year older than I. He was a nice looking boy, with full cheeks and a slender Olympian build. His hair, like all Euweepees' hair, shone ebony, except for vivid golden streaks, the rich sunniness of fourteen carats. And, like all my people, his black eyes swirled with streamers of gold, glittering like a shooting star, continuously twirling onward and onward inside the iris.

Yet his eyes always seemed to have another quality, a tenderness that touched on the brink of misery. They could be sad, while at the same time fierce, suggesting the innocent wildness of a young buck.

One afternoon he suddenly pushed aside the blanket-covered door and stood staring coldly at the far wall. I looked up quickly from my work.

"Pol, what are you doing home so early?"

Startled, his eyes met mine and held, before he brushed past to stand facing the fire.

"Pol?"

There was silence.

"I've been fired, Leera."

"Fired. But why?"

"They say the mines are running out. They have fired two hundred of us, and laid off fifty."

And then he turned to me, the anguish showing in his gold flamed eyes. "There are people with families. What are we going to do, Leera? What are we going to do?"

I was stunned. "Maybe Maman will know."

"Yeah," he repeated bitterly. "Maybe Maman will know."

Then he left, dejected. Outside, I could hear him crooning to Tanta, our brown, boney dog, and could imagine him stroking her flea-bitten fur.

"You been good, Tanta? Did you take care of the girls for me? Huh? Oh, sure you have, Tanta, sure you have." Then I heard the muffled sobs smothered by the dog's warm coat.

The next morning, Pol set out to find work. He ventured alone into the dazzling glass city of the Green Mountain People. There, the streets were paved with mother of pearl and the palaces stretched tremendously close to the sky. His swirling eyes and deeply tanned face seemed to him to be a poor contrast to the luminous sea-green skin and crystal blue eyes of the Green Mountain People.

To him, they appeared terribly strange. He later related how children jeered and taunted him, laughing at his brownness. That was a thing he did not understand. When they threw emerald colored stones at him, he caught them, thinking them pretty instead of abusive.

A youthful woman with pale lavender hair, he said, called him over to clean the debris away from her glass porch. When he asked the price, she only laughed.

"You really think I should pay you?"

He hurried down the pavement with her echoing laughter ringing in his ears.

There in the city, he saw a young woman, framed by her window, hurl green apples at the passersby, and an old man fling stale tea at the giggling girls who strolled by his open door. Several laughing children ran and pinched each other's arms, while one little fellow tried to slap their thighs with a china plate.

Confused, Pol longed to come home. But, remembering me and Maman, he kept his slender legs walking, while the glass sheet walls loomed alien around him.

Exactly what happened next, Pol later could not completely remember. It seemed, he said, that the street suddenly shook and the earth violently rumbled. The pavement of pearl scrunched together, before jaggedly breaking into piercing slabs. Just a block away, a tall glass building shattered, dropping huddled to the ground. Pol feared, he said, that the entire city's walls would rain down upon him.

But just as quickly as it started, it stopped. And he felt frozen. His rough hands limply dangled by his torn pants' leg. In the distance, he could hear the stunned city awakening with a few faint screams and children crying. A laughing little man leaped past, clutching an azure bag containing a single stick of dynamite teetering from its rim.

Coming to, Pol began running towards a gathering crowd. There, men, women, and children drifted, surrounding the chipped hills of glass that tried to defy passage to the fallen building.

Next to Pol, a little girl whispered, as though reaching out from a dream. "My mother is in there."

A husky man, irritated, turned and barked at her to hush.

Pol was astounded. No one was trying to do anything. A few people strolled away. The others remained just standing.

"Why doesn't someone do something?" Pol questioned a violet-cloaked man beside him.

"What should they do?" he nonchalantly answered. Then, turning and realizing with whom he was conversing, the man's mouth dropped. Horrified, he slipped back into the crowd.

But Pol was not to be distracted. "How many are trapped?" he asked another.

"Oh," sighed the man, "it was a business building, probably several." And then, fidgeting nervously, as though he had said too much, he also disappeared.

Pol was in anguish. The whole thing was terribly revolting! How could the Green Mountain People just stand? In frustration, he yelled, "Isn't anybody going to do something?"

No one else seemed to share his frenzy. Several of the bystanders sent him cold, piercing stares, as though to say, "What are you in such an uproar about?" Parts of the crowd began to disperse.

Aggravated, Pol searched around in desperation. "If no one else will do something," he decided,

"then I will. I need something to act as a pick."

However, almost everything was made of glass. The street-cleaner's broom was composed of crystal and sea shells. The garbage pails were porcelain, and the gay colored carts were only of wax. Then suddenly, he spotted it: a blue metal ax with a jade handle. It sat as if waiting, propped in a store front window.

Slipping off his sandal, Pol clutched the front toe, and with one mighty crack of the heel sent the window pane shattering. Several bystanders gazed in astonishment, but he hadn't time to listen. Reaching inside, he grabbed the ax and was gone.

Darting through the gaping crowd, like a low breeze across a field of lavender and green violets, he reached the mountain of glass alone.

"Will you help?" he shouted.

There was no answer. Turning, he set to work with calloused fingers chipping away chunks of glass. Inside, he could see wavering forms, changing as though within a House of Mirrors. Splinters flew and cut his calves and chest. His arms grew weary. Yet, fearing that the Green Mountain People would try to stop him, he hurriedly kept on. His biceps strained, and the sweat slid from his skin like rain sheds from the leaves. His teeth gritted.

From inside, he could hear murmers, although he still couldn't make out what they were saying. To him, the captives appeared to be miles away, instead of several feet. He could distinguish blurred faces now, and could tell their eyes were upon him. But what the faces felt, he had no idea. Through the glass, they were completely defined in green. Even their lavender hair and blue eyes looked green.

Stopping to wipe the dripping sweat out of his eyes, Pol gazed back at the crowd. They were still there. Standing perfectly still, they watched him with expressionless faces. Even the child whose mother was trapped looked blank.

Ignoring them, Pol set back to breaking the endless boulders of glass. But now, he later told me, he was beginning to wonder why. If the people themselves did not care, then why should he? If they would not rescue their own people, then why should he, the outsider, do it?

Not knowing the answers, he continued to swing his ax. With each blast cracking another chunk, he would ask himself why. Yet as though it was the ax itself that was guiding his arm, he continually carried it up to create another powerful blow.

He was getting close. A first story room had remained intact and the captives were lined up waiting. Some of the injured sat huddled close to the desks, holding bruised arms and cut elbows. Others merely stood calmly.

"Three more strikes," whispered Pol fervently. "Two more strikes. Just one. That may be all." He swung with the quivering weight of his entire body. The blade struck, and the last slab sliced straight through.

"There, it is done!" His bleeding hands, filled with glass slivers, vehemently pushed aside the last blocking chunks, and he stood staring, face to face with the Green Mountain People.

No one appeared to be particularly frightened. With composure, they sized him up, then one by one slid past him into the daylight. One aged man gazed into his eyes for a moment. Relaxing his eyebrows and parting his lips, he started to speak. But thinking better of it, he studied his feet before moving on. When the last person had filed out, Pol followed. The crowd was no different. It stood guardedly, watching for his next move.

But Pol made none. He was weary of them. Instead of thanks, he received cold, icy stares that bit and chilled like a sleet-filled wind. Frowning, wrinkled brows and sour, gnarled lips grimaced from all sides.

Angry at their courtesy and angry at himself, Pol slung the ax down, listening to its empty clatter. Then he headed straight towards the crowd. It readily opened like the ripping of a sheet.

But Pol no longer cared. He quickly hurried past their stares and out into the city. There the

shimmering walls seemed to him as cold and temperal as ice. Determined, he steered towards home, and never once did he pause or turn to look back.

When he finally reached home, Maman and I were waiting. Hearing his footsteps, Maman had dished up a bowl of chopped salamander. But Pol did not appear. I went out to find him. There he was, sitting upon his favorite stone next to the door. Slumped forward, his head hung wearily in his hands. It was not until I had reached him that I realized those hands were torn and bleeding, and that his dark hair harbored chips of glass.

"What's happened, Pol?"

He tilted his head. I thought I saw a faint green glow from the glass revealed in his twirling eyes.

"They don't feel," he answered.

"Who doesn't feel?"

"The Green Mountain People."

"What are you talking about? Here, stand up and let me pick all this glass out of you."

He obeyed like a tired three-year-old. I brushed the glass from his hair and gently pulled the slivers out of his skin. He barely winced.

"What are you thinking, Pol? You're so quiet. This isn't like you."

"Huh? Oh. I don't really think I was thinking anything. What are you doing with the glass?"

"Just throwing it on the ground. Why?"

"I thought perhaps we should bury it. That way Tanta won't cut her feet."

"Oh well. All right. Wait until I finish getting it all off of you. There. I think that's it. Do you feel any anywhere else?"

"No."

"Well, we can cover it up then."

We started to throw loose dirt over the ground where he had stood, but, peering down, we couldn't see a single sliver shining with the light from the door. It was as if the earth itself had swallowed it.

"Uh, tell me, Pol, what should I do with your shirt? It looks pretty hopeless. See how shredded it is and how stuck through with glass."

"Bury it. I can't use it anymore."

"Bury it? Are you sure? Well, okay. You go on in and wash up," I told him. "Maman has dinner waiting for you. She has probably heard every word we've said. I'll go and bury it, I guess between those two boulders up on the slope where the dirt is soft."

I studied him. Was it my imagination, I wondered, or was there a faint tint of green within his eyes?

"Pol, do your eyes feel all right?"

"Yes. That's a funny question to ask."

"Here, get more in the light and let me check. Can you see okay?"

"Sure, I can see fine." And then for the first time that evening he smiled. "Silly Leera, worrying over me like an old mother hen. I'll be better, I'm just tired and upset. That's all. Besides," he laid his palm on his cut chest, "where it hurts is inside, and you can't just reach in and pull that out like you can glass. But Leera," his voice softened, "thank you." With that, he turned and went inside. As I distastefully held up his shirt, I could hear him speaking with Maman.

"The Green Mountain People just don't feel anything!"

"Pol, all people feel, only in different ways."

"These people don't."

"Oh, Pol," Maman soothed, "you must still believe in people. Even the coldest and hardest of people have a spark of feeling down somewhere inside themselves."

"I don't know."

"If you give up on them," she whispered, "then you are no different than they."

Afterwards that night, Pol slept restlessly. I could hear him tossing and rolling. I was sure his

aching flesh must be bruised. Immediately before dawn, he rose and crept outside. I followed, grabbing his blanket and wrapping mine around me. There he was once again, sitting on his stone, thinking.

"Pol, I brought you this, you must be cool."

Throwing the soft wool over his shoulders, he continued to sit as before, his eyes vacantly fixed on the ground around his feet.

"Leera," he finally questioned, "does the night seem different to you?"

"Different? What do you mean?"

"It feels different, like there is something very mysterious floating around in the air."

"You must be crazy, Pol. You're still shaken up about yesterday. You've been acting different ever since."

"No." He jumped up and stretched out his hand, trying to take hold of something, only to find his palm empty. Perturbed, he sat back down.

"There is something different. I know it. I just know it."

The night sky began to lighten, heralding in the approaching sun rays. Raising his eyebrows, Pol gazed up towards his shirt's grave.

"Sssh, listen."

"What is it, Pol?"

"Quiet. Can't you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"Water."

Faintly the sweet sound of bubbling water crept into our ears.

"My gosh! Somewhere there's a stream, Leera! There's a stream!"

He leaped and skirted excitedly up the slope. Pebbles scrambled beneath his scampering feet.

"Leera, come quick!"

There nestled and almost buried between the two twin boulders, sprang a stream. Pol cupped his hand and dipped. Lifting it to his lips, the water slid across his tongue.

"It's like honey, it is so sweet and cool. Strange, though. I have never tasted water like this."

The sun's rays started streaming the sky, letting us see.

"Look," he exclaimed, "it's the color of fresh cream. Hey, perhaps," his eyes grew wide at the thought, "perhaps we'll be able to grow things with it. We could farm! I could irrigate, and..."

As if listening, the fiery sun finally slipped beyond the mountains to light the morning. Pol gazed around us.

"Leera, look! My word!"

His long finger pointed down towards the house. There, covering the country-side, burst forth plants! Beautiful brown plants, kinds we had never seen before. They were actually growing before our very eyes. There were tall thin russet grasses, beige watermelon vines, and long stalks bearing sorrel-colored corn. Slender trees sprang up, unfolding auburn-shelled pecans, while bright coppery pumpkins lined their knitted roots.

In amazement, Pol whispered, "It's everywhere."

And it was true. The gurgling springs broke through age-old rocks. All along Euweepees' land the strange plants blanketed the barren earth.

And then the distant houses seemed to come alive. Barefoot children ran to sip the liquid. Their sleepy-eyed parents stood astounded at their doors. Young girls bent to touch wild chestnut roses and marigolds.

Pol's smile seemed so big, that I was afraid it might slide right off his face.

"Maman, Maman!" cried Pol, "it's a miracle, see!"

The shack had never looked so beautiful as it did that morning. Living brownery wove itself across the outside walls. Hazel moss tufted the roof.

There, a serene Maman met Pol standing within the doorway. Her wise twinkling eyes, shaded by wrinkles, seemed themselves to be smiling.

"Look Maman!" cried Pol. "It's a miracle, see!"

But, gazing at Pol, she did not look. She did not turn to see the clinging plants, or the lovely, cream-colored, life-giving stream. Instead, she saw only Pol, and the deep green reflections in his golden black eyes.

Amy Douglas

THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS

The neighborhood allowed itself to skirt the river, but not to be embraced by it. Sky-shadowing oaks walled out the distractions of the sawmills and fertilizer plants that lay with the river, as the patched, narrow streets filtered out casual traffic.

Though the one-way streets were choked with parked cars, they did not exclude all traffic. Janine Casey squeezed her Volkswagen sedan to the curb behind the white shark-shape of the Springfield's old Cadillac and heaved a sigh that did nothing to relieve the tightness between her full breasts, though she felt as if it ought to make her feel better. For a long moment after she switched off the ignition, she sat and stared at the nearest house. It was a rambling one-story, painted a dark, shimmering blue-gray which her parents called "green," not much different from the other houses in the neighborhood. The cramped feeling in her lungs spread into her stomach, until she had to move before it paralysed her. At the thought of sitting in her car all the cold afternoon, until she died of exposure, a giggle burst against her lips and she swung her plump body from the car, bounded up the walk, and pushed the doorbell button firmly. As she waited for the door to open, she tucked a stray wave of her waist-length black hair behind a lobeless ear, and glanced at the solid gray sky, wishing she had not misplaced her driving gloves. She looked beyond the narrow yard where the trees had starved out the grass to the wrought-iron fence of the house next door. The house was younger than the fence, younger than all the houses on the short block by at least fifty years. It did not quite fit into the neighborhood, though it had been designed for that purpose. It was red brick, with white antebellum pillars, its newness softened by the carefully preserved fence and great trees around it. Janine was not interested in the house. It merely gave her somewhere to keep her eyes until the door should open, but while she waited she decided that she knew why it looked like an anachronism. The McKinleys had built it for themselves when their first-generation business began to prosper, and it would have looked more at home set in one of the broad lawns of the newer, more expensive sections of her part of town. She had been inside it once, for Alexis McKinley's birthday party, but the only thing she could remember clearly was that the heating system worked too well, which reminded her that it was time to press the button again. Her thick dimpled fingers, with the caked rims of paint under the square nails, were stiff as she fumbled to raise the collar of her short plaid coat.

Before she could wonder when the winter rain of the morning would begin again, she was relieved by the thud of feet on uncarpeted floor, and David was opening the louvered door, slowly and cautiously as if to prevent heat from escaping the house. "Come on in, you're the first to arrive." She ducked her head and slipped past him without answering, not caring if he saw her smile or not. The hall was wide and dark, leading straight to the cave of light at the back of the house where the rest of his family was spending the afternoon, as she could tell by the sound of one television and two or three radios all tuned to different stations. As she hurried into the first room off the hall, she inhaled deeply

the puzzling smell of the house, which she thought was red wine and old wood, and the peculiar inhuman smell of David's room, of red wine and old wood with library paste. That afternoon the house-smell was overlaid with boiled cabbage, and she surmised that the Springfields had just finished lunch.

As she settled into the worn brown armchair that had been "her chair" for the past two years, David ambled to the sagging Colonial sofa opposite her and poured his angular body onto the red-and-green print cushions. "How are things?" he asked.

"Fine, just fine," Janine replied, and smiled, ignoring the wire strips and rubber bands that forced her small white teeth from their intention of turning at right angles to each other. It was true. She was here and everything was fine.

"If nobody shows up in a few minutes, I'm going to start calling people," David announced, propping his immense tennis shoes on the coffee table next to a three-D chessboard. Janine glanced furtively at his ankles, which looked as thin as chicken bones below the too-short legs of his gray-green pants. His thinness fascinated her. It seemed incredible that his literal ugliness could project such beauty, and her smile widened. She remembered happily that she had forced herself to wash her hair the night before. It was heavy and clammy when it got wet, and she always put off the task as long as she could, but she was glad of its notable cleanness now.

Silence threatened, and David pulled himself out of the sofa. "I'll go start calling. Be back in a few minutes," he said as he lumbered out of the room.

As soon as he was gone, Janine snuggled deeper in the chair, trying to avoid the fingers of cold that pried into the room around the warped edges of the window-frames. The damp cold was unrelieved by the fire that flickered in the small fireplace at the back of the room, but that was not surprising, since the fuel was scrap boards David had appropriated from building sites. Janine's toes were chilled through her saddle Oxfords, and she wiggled them as she fingered David's blue-green cardigan where it hung on the back of the chair. Taking catlike pleasure in the softness of the wool, she looked around the room with a feeling of proprietary delight.

Compared to her own pink, dotted-Swiss room, David's room was hardly a bedroom at all, despite the studio couch tucked in the corner between her chair and the fireplace. It was more the cell of a privileged and untidy monk. The furniture was castoffs from the rest of the house, except for two black-enamelled bookcases against the sliding cream-colored doors that led to the hall. These bookcases were completely filled with well-tended paperbacks arranged according to size and subject. An older bookcase of dark-varnished wood in the corner beside the sofa held a small stereo and a black-metal rack of albums, as well as new hardcovers and a few tattered "Oz" books.

The books delighted Janine. The only books she had accumulated were state-owned textbooks and library books, and a few science-fiction novels David had given her for Christmas and her birthday, which he assured her he had bought as publisher's closeouts. There was no need, as her mother said, for her to buy books when the public library was barely three miles away, a block from David's house, in fact, and all her allowance went for art supplies anyway.

While she was admiring the room and trying to get warm, David came back and put another chunk of wood on the sickly fire before he sprawled on the sofa. He sighed as he announced, "Kerry's gone out of town with his folks--he told me last week. Steve's girlfriend is over there, but he may be over later--" Janine laughed and he agreed, "but more likely not. And Robert's mother asked me where he is. So it looks as if we're the only members who're going to show." After a pause, he added, "Too bad my parents are here."

"Too bad," Janine smiled and shrugged. "There'll be other times, though." A lifetime of them, she added to herself.

"Oh well--" He launched himself at the stereo with his normal abruptness and then asked, "What would you like to hear?"

"Doesn't matter." He chose a classic, Dylan's "Self-Portrait." It was a two-record album and

would fill the conversational gaps for quite awhile. As he settled back onto the sofa, the record began, loud enough to shut out the family noise, the clash of dishes in the sink and the occasional rumble of Mr. Springfield's voice in a tone of command from the back of the house. They were shut in by the music and the growing cold of the afternoon, and Janine felt they were the last people on earth.

David looked thoughtfully from the chessboard to Janine. "That's right, you don't play," he said, almost to himself, and picked up an onyx pawn, rubbing it over with his long blunt-tipped fingers. Janine noticed that his thin nails were bitten ragged, and hoped he would think it was entirely the draft from the window that made her shudder. It was odd, that while half the time she wanted him to know what she was thinking, the other half she was glad that he could not know her to the same depth that she knew him, from the smooth ivory skin that stretched bone-tight over the hard lump of his Adam's apple to the marrow of his soul. She feared it would upset him if he knew the time she spent with the name dictionary, selecting matches for "Springfield." They would have only two children, because more would be an offense to the groaning earth. David said that he would have no children, and this disturbed her more than his assertion that he would never marry.

It would be such a long time before the union of their spirits could be completed in the flesh, she thought, as her eye caught the stack of college catalogs under the coffee table. "David—" Her voice almost cracked with the unfamiliar use of his name, but she had to recall his attention from the duel of black knight and white queen. "Have you finished applying yet?"

"Oh, yes. I began last fall, remember? I hope Harvard will take me as an experimental risk. Where have you applied?"

"Just to State. They have a very good art department."

He pursed his lips and nodded wisely. "I hope you get in—they're pretty competitive for a land-grant college. Hell, you probably will. Your work is **good**." He picked at a small white pimple on his sharp chin. "I wish you'd do more graphics, though."

Janine smiled and shook her head. "I'll have to, when I get in school. Right now I'd rather paint." He was the only person to whom she could say, "I'm going to be an artist," rather than, "I hope to be a painter." He couldn't draw a curved line without a compass himself, and he stood in intoxicated awe of anyone who could.

The brown-papered walls were hung with framed pictures, crude paintings by local amateurs. In the place of honor above the cream-enamelled mantel hung her Christmas present to him, a Martian canyon landscape of red rocks and blue sky mirrored in a canal. Though she could not see it from where she sat, she remembered every brushstroke. He had been delighted by it, and she had never bothered to tell him that she first saw it in a dream, a dream of high adventure in which she had sheltered in his valiant arms from man-eating Martian sand-slugs who were, in the sunny light of the dream and her love, about as terrifying as ducklings.

Her mention of college had roused him to action. He plucked a dusty catalog off the floor and began to read enthusiastically, "'Playwrighting Workshop, one year, six hours.' 'Directing Lab.' Wonder what they have in filmmaking? Listen to this--'Elementary Cinematography'--"

Janine picked up the top catalog on the stack and pretended interest. It was from the University of Virginia. Her interest became genuine. "Were you thinking of going there?" she asked.

"Maybe. My Cousin Fairchild lives up there and I could probably move in with him long enough to claim in-state tuition."

"That's a good idea," Janine beamed at him. For a moment she wondered what Cousin Fairchild would think, but then, David was welcome anywhere he went. Besides, she had heard of this Fairchild Lorimar before. He was about twenty-three and he and David were good friends. Janine thought of her own cousins, who lived out in New Mexico and always seemed to be involved in car wrecks and lawsuits. David himself had been born in Virginia, and only his father's job kept the Springfields in the Deep South. She expected that her children, David's children, would grow up hearing the sweet alien voice of David's people, and never attach to themselves the shrill nasal

accents of the good folk here.

Like their accents, the Springfield's religion set them apart from Janine's acquaintances. They were the only Episcopalians she knew, except her father's doctor's nephew. She and David would probably be married in his church, though he was an avowed and argumentative atheist, or had been, she reminded herself. She suspected he was drifting toward agnosticism, while she remained a quiet and hesitant atheist herself, a position held by most of the members of the society of which she and David were the only members present. The church was a detail, like the material of her dress and names of her attendants. She had no close girlfriends, but his little sister could always be Maid of Honor--or Matron of Honor, since Linda's professed desire was to get married as soon as possible.

Janine was trying to decide between traditional and original vows when she felt David looking at her and glanced up quickly, noticing that his green eyes were a smoky blue in the light from the desk-lamp.

He didn't break off his gaze as he normally did, but looked at her until she was afraid he could see that her heart was fluttering into her throat. "What were you thinking, just then?" he asked. "You looked away and sort of smiled about something."

"What? Oh, I don't know. Nothing important," she smiled. "It's too bad nobody else showed up," she added nonchalantly.

"Yeah, well--we had a good meeting last week."

"What happened after I left?" She'd had to leave at five, as usual, because the Caseys had supper early on Sundays and her parents didn't want her driving around after dark, though it was February and the days were getting longer. When she left, the literary discussion that was the purpose of the meetings had been degenerating into the usual series of bawdy syllogisms that left her breathless with laughter, though she could never think fast enough to contribute. "You guys were about to go to the Ratburger for cokes, weren't you?"

"Never got there. We took the Pimpmobile and went across the river. Kerry nearly got us killed, trying to drag with a Mustang--" He looked properly disapproving before he was shaken with a silent convulsion of laughter. "Then he saw it had a Loyal Order of Police thing on the license plate!" Janine laughed until tears leaped into her eyes. "We got to the park and it was full of rednecks with grubby little kids, so we treated them to our version of 'Dear Abby.' Then we broke out the zappguns and Robert fell in the backwater trying to fill his--you know where the mud always smells like dead fish?"

"Where we almost threw Cathy in with the dead turtle," Janine recalled.

"So we all pulled off our coats and wrapped him up. We wanted to stay after dark but he was afraid he'd catch pneumonia. We took him home and then Charlie remembered the Possum wouldn't start, so we went by the Jarvises' and borrowed their jumper cables. And after we got the Possum started the Pimpmobile wouldn't move!"

Janine gasped appreciatively. "What did you do?"

"After Charlie took us home, he and Kerry went back to fix it."

"I wish I had been there," Janine sighed. "Robert must've looked like an idiot."

"Like his normal self."

"Did Charlie get the Pimp started?"

"Don't know. I haven't seen him in school all week--though that could mean anything. It could mean he got it fixed and is camping at the Jarvises'."

"I think he and Suzette make a cute couple," Janine remarked.

"Ah yes. Sweet girl, but her morals are strictly improvisational."

Janine ignored that. Suzette was always nice to her. "It would be too bad if he didn't get it fixed."

"The Pimpmobile? Oh, he'd get another old wreck and fix it up."

"But it's the only car the whole club can get in at the same time," Janine reminded him.

"That's true. Remember the time we got eight of us in your beetle?"

"Julie's party. Wasn't Charlie with us?"

"That's right--nine of us. No, he doesn't count. He was on top."

"It seems like there were more there," Janine mused.

"Alexis and Liz left right after supper," David replied, adding, "That reminds me—" before he lunged around the coffee table. Janine knew, despite the tension that shot through her body like a bolt of electricity, that he was not headed for her chair. He went to the desk and she thought he was after the zapgun he kept in the top drawer, but instead of a water pistol he brought back a letter. "I heard from Alexis last week."

Alexis--of course, Janine thought, Alexis McKinley, who had left for college after her junior year. Despite the fact that she lived in that modern Southern mansion next door, she had seldom come to meetings.

"Here it is," David began to read from the letter, "'Here I am, surrounded by the intellectual raggickers of three states, working half as hard as I did in high school, and loving it.' " He chuckled and Janine laughed dutifully. Alexis was brilliant, everything she said was clever. An image popped out of her memory. Alexis, a six-foot blonde with a poker-straight spine, sitting just out of David's reach on the sofa, snapped her teeth shut in the middle of a yawn when David looked from her to Janine and said, "You two look like Helena and Hermia."

"I'm glad she's doing well." When exactly had Alexis gone away to college? It was after her junior year, when Janine and David were still sophomores. It was, Janine recalled with a suppressed shiver, about a month before the first time David kissed her. She wished she could remember something intelligent to say about Alexis, but nothing stood out in her mind.

David turned the closely-typewritten pages of the letter. She was relieved that he did not read any more of it aloud. He folded it carefully and replaced the envelope in his desk. It was time to change records and this time he did not ask her opinion before he stacked a couple of Simon and Garfunkel's on the changer. All David's records were old, Janine remembered. He'd never adjusted to anything later than Crosby, Stills and Nash, without Young. His taste seemed to have remained the same as it was when he was thirteen, long before Janine met him. She imagined that the room had not changed either.

When he had attended to the stereo and placed the last ends of boards on the fire, he returned to the chessboard and Janine was left in peace. She tilted her head as if listening to the music, noting the dirty nets of cobwebs in the high corners of the white ceiling. While she picked at the exposed cotton batting on the arm of her chair, she enjoyed the deep, sub-psychological warmth that had replaced the cold-oatmeal ache in her stomach as soon as she had realized she was safe at the meeting. She remembered another meeting and a momentary lapse in her habitual caution, and what she had said to--was it Alexis? She had said, "I have a feeling these meetings are going to be the happiest times of my life," and Alexis had replied indulgently, "Kid, you are weird. Really weird."

She didn't blame Alexis. How could anyone understand what she could only phrase awkwardly when she said it at all? She wished that she could paint her happiness, but her memories could be confined to canvas no more than they could to paper. She could paint the room, accidental and uncomposed as it was, a study in the dying light of a winter afternoon, but how could she paint the smell of cabbage and old books, the broken softness of the chair, the creeping cold that seeped from the river to ripple the white curtains. These were the least important things in the room, she thought. They were not the substance of her joy. How could anyone paint the remembrance of a similar cold day the month before, when David's family had been temporarily absent, when he had sat in this chair and held her on his bony knees. She could still feel the cold of the room on one side of her face, the fever-heat of his smooth-shaven cheek on the other, the world-filling throb of her heart--or was it his? How would she paint David and Janine, two individuals born at set times and places of parents who were also individuals, who in their peculiarity represented all the forces of unity and

division that bound all things in one, against time and death, all the force that Janine could not call "God" because that word had been made too small.

She was back on the edge of what she had never tried to paint, what she called to herself "the golden abyss," the blue-velvet void with the cat's cradle of stars, which was full of light but impossible to see into because it was so vast. It was the world she saw from David's arms, as they stood distinct from it and yet not the least important part of it. Perhaps in death she would no longer feel the distinction.

She thought of death, as she often did, trying to grasp it. She knew for a fact that she would die, but she had never succeeded in transmuting the fact to belief. There would be nothing after she died--or she would know nothing, but the golden abyss would remain, ever full of itself, ever gaping to receive more of itself.

Death quenched the ache in her still-closed womb that she always felt when she wanted to touch David and could not. Death would banish all the memories she could not put on canvas. She would die and there would be nothing of her that mattered left. Then her mind broke through to the world without herself, and she wished that she could faint away from the vacuum of that world and at once remain conscious and alive forever.

Something of what she saw must have been reflected on her face, for she realized that David was leaning forward, his fine brows drawn in concern. "Janine? Is something the matter?"

The vision was still with her, and she knew that, for once, she would be able to tell him exactly what she thought. She would say simply, "I just knew what it felt like to die," and he would understand. Maybe, she recognized with wonder, he would often understand what she meant, and from then on they could talk as clearly as he did with others of the society, with those who could only mean far less to him.

She swallowed hard and began, "David, I--"

"David! Telephone!" His sister's high voice interrupted from the hall.

"Just a minute," he shouted toward the living room, as he bolted from the sofa. To Janine's surprise he did not head straight for the hall but detoured by her chair, leaned over, and clumsily pressed his large hand against her shoulder for an instant.

"David! It's Alexis!" his sister called.

"I'm coming, dammit, I'm coming!" After he left, Janine could still feel the weight of his fingers.

Gradually, she caught her breath. She had meant to tell David something, but the moment had passed and it no longer mattered. There would be other occasions. For the first time that afternoon, she consulted her watch and saw that it was after four.

David had told her that she was welcome to borrow any book that interested her and, to distract herself from the aftermath of her already fading emotion, she got up, noticing that she had stopped trembling. She knelt before the wooden bookcase and read the familiar titles. She was about to leave for the paperback shelves when she saw a volume she didn't recognize, a small worn book, obviously used, out of place next to the modern books in their still-immaculate dustjackets. She opened it carefully, half-expecting a silverfish to crawl out, and thought for a second that it was **The Canterbury Tales** before she saw that the text was broken into stanzas. She flipped to the title page, which stated "Troilus and Criseyde," and was about to return it to the shelf when the flyleaf fell out. Glad that David wasn't there, she snatched it up and was arrested by the message written on it in bold purple ink.

"'Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.' Merry Christmas from Alexis to David."

As she sat clutching the book, she thought of how embarrassed she would be if David wrote something like that in a gift book to her. Then she tried to place the epigraph, knowing that it came from somewhere in Senior English. Mrs. Collins had made them buy an extra textbook, a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets, and the quotation belonged right after "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments." Strange that Alexis should write that, when it was just what Janine and

David had, a marriage of true minds. She wished that she and Alexis were closer friends. It would be nice to have someone to confide in about David.

Her mind felt disarranged, as if a North wind had swept through it and scattered all its lighter objects. She had never known that David was on Alexis' Christmas list. Perhaps he had never shown her this book because it was such a small ugly thing compared to her painting. Perhaps Alexis had given it to him years ago, rather than this past Christmas. There was no date with the dedication, and Alexis and David had known each other for years and she had, somehow, never noticed it before. She put the flyleaf back in carefully and replaced the book on the shelf.

By the time David came back she was sitting in her chair as if she had never moved. "That was Alexis," he said, and Janine observed that he was blushing. "She's home for their winter holidays or whatever and she said she'd be over after supper tonight."

"That's nice," Janine replied, wondering why she could not smile.

"I told her you were here and she said she'd like to see you. Could you stay?" he asked, after a pause.

Janine looked at her watch. "Oh, no, David. You know I have to be home for supper."

"That's right. Too bad--we'd have had fun. But there'll be other times."

"You two enjoy yourselves, now," Janine said, before the quiet could give her time for her thoughts to resume their wind-driven skitter across her face. "I'd better go--Dad gets upset if I'm late." She began to put on her coat, keeping her eyes on the fireplace where the last piece of wood had long since vanished as if it had never been.

"Janine--" and though she did not particularly like her name, she knew that his voice had never made it sound more beautiful.

"Yes?" She saw him hesitate, and knew he was going to say something other than what he intended.

"I'll see you next week?"

"Okay. Give Alexis my regards if I don't see her," Janine said, as he held the front door for her. She averted her eyes from the warm glow of the porch light as she coaxed the engine into life, and as she left the shelter of the trees at the end of the street, sleet rattled on the car-roof like a handful of bridal rice to speed her into the starless abyss.

Mary Kay Temple

QUAD

Spring 1975

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Bill Meredith, assistant editor
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Special thanks to:

Cokesbury

2011 3rd Avenue North
Birmingham

Smith and Hardwick

406 North 20th Street
Birmingham

Little Professor Book Center

2901 South 18th Street
Homewood

Southside Bookstore

1915 11th Avenue South
Birmingham

QUAD, published twice a year by the students of Birmingham-Southern College, is a magazine of student literature and art. Subsidized by the Student Government Association through the Publications Board, the magazine contains materials by students currently enrolled at 'Southern.

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|------------------------|--------------|
| child | Lynne Wright |
| man and tree | Lynne Wright |
| young woman and window | Nigil |
| old woman | Nigil |

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